DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 828 TM 028 403

AUTHOR Jacobvitz, Deborah; Crosby, Danielle; Wooley, John; Smith, Ralph

TITLE ASPIRE: An Even Start Program of Communities in Schools. Final Evaluation Report, Year 3, 1996-97. Publication Number 96.20.

INSTITUTION Austin Independent School District, TX. Dept. of Accountability, Student Services, and Research.

PUB DATE 1997-11-00
NOTE 39p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Literacy; Adult Reading Programs; *Early Childhood Education; *Family Programs; Low Income Groups; *Parent Education; *Parenting Skills; Poverty; Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; Tables (Data); Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS Austin Independent School District TX; *Even Start

ABSTRACT

The 1996-97 school year marked the third year of a 4-year grant from the Texas Education Agency's Division of Adult and Community Education for funding the ASPIRE/Even Start program operated by Communities In Schools-Central Texas Inc. (CIS). The broad purpose of Even Start is to help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy in families by improving the educational opportunities of low-income families with young children through an integrated program of early childhood education, adult literacy training, and parenting skills education. In 1996-97, the ASPIRE program served 77 families at 2 locations. The evaluation team, which was assembled before the start of the third program year, met with the program coordinator several times throughout the year. Measures for determining the effectiveness of the program included observations, interviews, portfolio examination, and curricular review. Evaluators found that the program provides a diverse array of services, and that these services are carefully tailored to meet the needs of individual families, with the needs and progress of families carefully tracked and modifications made as needed. Mothers experienced an impressive reduction in stress due to child characteristics and child rearing. ASPIRE encourages the literacy and language skills of both children and parents. Recommendations are made for program improvement, including promoting more participation by fathers. Three appendixes contain the early childhood program description, parent education modules, and parenting stress index scales. (Contains six tables.) (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 419 828

Final Evaluation Report
Year 3
1996-97

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Holly Williams
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

Austin Independent School District

Department of Accountability, Student Services, and Research

Office of Program Evaluation

TM028403

2

Publication Number 96.20
November 1997

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
Department of Accountability, Student Services, & Research
Office of Program Evaluation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: CIS/ASPIRE EVEN START PROGRAM 1996-97

Authors: Deborah Jacobvitz, Danielle Crosby (University of Texas), John Wooley (SWTSU), Ralph Smith (AISD)

Overview

The 1996-97 school year marked the third year of a four-year grant from the Texas Education Agency's Division of Adult and Community Education for funding of the ASPIRE/ Even Start Program operated by Communities In Schools-Central Texas, Inc. (CIS). The broad purpose of Even Start is to help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy in families by improving the educational opportunities of low-income families with young children (ages birth through seven years) through an integrated program of early childhood education, adult literacy training, and parenting skills education. Even Start seeks to assist parents in gaining the skills necessary for them to become full partners in the education of their children. In 1996-97, the ASPIRE program served 77 families at two locations covering the attendance zones of Allison, Dawson, Harris, and Travis Heights Elementary Schools.

Budget Implications

Mandate: P.L. 103-382, ESEA Title I-B, IASA

1996-97 Budget
Federal/State: $250,000
Local: $120,956 (match)

Methodology

In a departure from the first two years of the grant, an evaluation team representing the University of Texas, Southwest Texas State University, and AISD was assembled prior to the beginning of the third year to address the major components of the program in greater depth. The evaluation team met with the program coordinator several times throughout the year to design, monitor, and discuss the progress of the evaluation. Measures for determining effectiveness of the program components included observations, interviews, portfolio examination, and curricular review.

Major Findings

1. Services are carefully tailored to the needs of individual families, with the needs and progress made by parents and children carefully tracked and modifications made as needed.
2. The ASPIRE program provides a diverse array of services to help improve parenting skills and to foster children's social and cognitive development and their literacy skills.
3. Mothers experienced an impressive reduction in stress due to child characteristics and childrearing.
4. ASPIRE encourages the emergent literacy and language skills of both children and parents in a variety of ways, including increasing parent involvement in children's education, through parent education classes, and by placing children in a classroom setting that helps prepare them for future success in school.

Recommendations

1. Resources are needed to work with the families more frequently, perhaps 4 times each week instead of twice.
2. ASPIRE needs to provide these in-depth services to even more families. Resources are needed to expand the program and to provide more classrooms for adult literacy.
3. Innovative techniques should be employed to encourage greater participation by fathers in the ASPIRE program.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: CIS/ASPIRE EVEN START PROGRAM 1996-97 i

TABLE OF CONTENTS 2

LIST OF TABLES 3

INTRODUCTION 4

A Brief History of the CIS/ASPIRE Even Start Grant 4
Description of Population Served 6
Components of the ASPIRE Program 7
Evaluation Design and Methodology 8
Evaluators' Findings 10
Adult Education Component *10*
Early Childhood Education Component *11*
Parenting Education and Parent-Child Interaction Time (PACT) *16*
Progress Toward Program Performance Objectives 24
Recommendations and Responses 27

APPENDICES 29

Appendix A: Early Childhood Program Description 30
Appendix B: Practical Parent Education Modules 31
Appendix C: Parenting Stress Index Scales 32

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Families Served by ASPIRE, by Attendance Area, 1996-97 7
Table 2: Early Childhood Education Classroom Hours, by Attendance Area, 1996-97* 7
Table 3: Number of Children Served by the Early Childhood Education, PAT, and HIPPY Programs, 1996-97 12
Table 4: Classroom Ratings on the Early Childhood Program Description 14
Table 5: Parent Satisfaction Survey-Benefits to Family 20
Table 6: Parents' Beliefs that ASPIRE Led to Improved Relationships with Their Children 21

INTRODUCTION

The 1996-97 school year marked the third year of a four-year grant from the Texas Education Agency's Division of Adult and Community Education for funding of the ASPIRE/ Even Start Program operated by Communities In Schools-Central Texas, Inc. (CIS). The Even Start Family Literacy Program was first enacted at the federal level in 1988 as Part B of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). The program was subsequently amended by the National Literacy Act of 1991, and again during the reauthorization of ESEA by the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994.

The broad purpose of Even Start is to help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy in families by improving the educational opportunities of low-income families with young children (ages birth through seven years) through an integrated program of early childhood education, adult literacy training, and parenting skills education. The Even Start program seeks to assist parents in gaining the skills necessary for them to become full partners in the education of their children. Even Start supports, directly or indirectly, four of the eight National Education Goals ("Goals 2000"), including:

Goal 1: All children in America will start school ready to learn.

Goal 3: All students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our Nation's modern economy.

Goal 5: Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Goal 8: Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.

Pursuant to the National Education Goals, the President delivered a "Call to Action" consisting of seven educational priorities for all students in the United States. Point Three of his call to action is: "All students will read independently and well by the end of 3rd grade." The goals of Even Start and the ASPIRE program appear to be closely aligned with this priority.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CIS/ASPIRE EVEN START GRANT

Central Texas has seen substantial increases in its Spanish-speaking immigrant population in recent years. With this growing population, many schools in the Austin Independent School District (AISD), particularly elementary campuses, have begun to face new challenges in educating a diverse, high-needs population. Research has shown family income level, parents' educational background, and parents' involvement with their children's schooling to be strong predictors of and substantial influences over students' early academic success. In 1994, Communities In Schools-Central Texas, Inc. was awarded a four-year grant to establish an Even Start Family Literacy Program in Austin to serve families with young children in the

attendance zones of several AISD elementary schools. The program was created to serve this population by combining a variety of approaches and by helping link these families to other services and resources in the community. All Even Start programs require cost sharing by the sponsoring agency, either with cash or in-kind matching services, beginning with a 10% requirement in the first year to 40% in the fourth year.

Though all families served by the ASPIRE (*A*chieving *S*uccess through *P*arental *I*nvolvement, *R*eading and *E*ducation) program are not necessarily immigrant, nearly all families who enroll in the program share some common characteristics:

- Over 90% of the adults in the families have not completed high school. The average level of education for adult participants is six years of public school instruction.
- Over 90% of families report annual incomes of less than $25,000, and more than 70% of the families report incomes of less than $15,000 per year. The average number of dependent children in program families is 2.6. The current federal poverty level guideline for a family of four is $14,350.
- The majority of adults in the program are Spanish-language dominant or monolingual, but do not read or write well in their native language; neither do they read or write well in English nor can they speak it fluently.
- Many of the adults in the families served by the program are young parents whose first child was born when they were twenty years of age or younger.

In its first year (1994-95), the ASPIRE centers were in actual operation for only three full months; yet the program recruited and actively served 44 families, representing 52 adults and 68 children who took part in the program. The adults were all Hispanic, with literacy levels ranging from non-literate in both Spanish and English to fully literate in Spanish with limited English proficiency (LEP). Fifty-four percent of the adults were classified as beginning-level ESL, 36% as intermediate, and 10% advanced ESL. With a mean age of 31, the adult cohort was relatively young. The 1995-96 school year was considered the first fully operational year for ASPIRE. During year two, ASPIRE was able to operate a year-round program in each of its three sites and meet all program objectives outlined in the 1995-96 program application.

In 1996-97, ASPIRE made some changes to improve the quality and amount of its services, reorganizing and targeting its efforts exclusively toward families in the Dawson, Travis Heights, and Harris attendance areas. The Allison Elementary site became a HIPPY site that continues to be operated by CIS. Some of the major changes and developments to the ASPIRE program in its third year included:

- On January 1, 1997 ASPIRE redeployed most staff and resources from Allison to Harris. Both Dawson and Harris have capacity for more participants since services at Allison were curtailed. Allison continued to receive services from the program through August 1997.
- On June 2, 1997 ASPIRE moved from San José Catholic Church to Dawson Elementary School after space was made available to the program. As a result, ASPIRE was positioned to take full advantage of the school resources. For example, school-age students used the gym for a dance program during the summer. ASPIRE was also able to realize some savings since the Dawson site was provided at no cost to the program.
- During the summer semester, ASPIRE contracted a teacher through ACC to pilot ABE/GED classes at Harris. Five students attended these classes regularly. They continue to be the core of the ABE/GED program in year four.
- ASPIRE conducted classes for 42 weeks during the 1996-97 school year.

Originally, three geographic areas of Austin were targeted for services at neighborhood elementary schools through the program: northeast Austin (Harris Elementary School), south-central Austin (Travis Heights and Dawson Elementary Schools), and the Montopolis area of southeast Austin (Allison Elementary School). Program services in the northeast area are delivered on the campus of Harris Elementary School. The south-central neighborhood is now served at Dawson Elementary School, but also includes participants from the attendance zone of Travis Heights Elementary School. The Montopolis area was served at Allison Elementary School. The sites were selected due to the sites' accessibility to a large concentration of Even Start target families and the proximity of these neighborhoods to the four original target schools (Dawson, Travis Heights, Harris and Allison).

DESCRIPTION OF POPULATION SERVED

Even Start programs are designed to serve families with one or more children aged 0-7 years. Eligible families are those who are "most in need" (i.e., who have a low income level and/or low parent literacy skills) and in which at least one parent:

- lacks a high school diploma or sufficient basic education skills necessary to function effectively in society; *or*
- is within the State's compulsory attendance age range, as long as a local education agency ensures the availability of the basic education component; *or*
- meets eligibility criteria for adult basic education programs under the National Literacy Act.

In the four school attendance areas of the ASPIRE program, the "most in need" population continues to be young, Hispanic adults with children who are unable to partake in many community activities due to their limited English skills and low level of education. The typical adult client of ASPIRE is an Hispanic female immigrant who is in her early thirties and has two children. She has completed less than seven years of schooling and has a family income of $13,500. The majority of her formal education has been outside of the United States. She communicates with her family in Spanish. She speaks English either not well or not at all. Typically, she stays at home with her children while her husband works in a blue-collar occupation. These families belong to what is often referred to as "the working poor." The ASPIRE Even Start Program clearly serves this "most in need" population.

Table 1 summarizes the number of families served by the ASPIRE program, by attendance area, in the 1996-97 school year (9/1/96—8/31/97). According to records maintained by program staff, over a three-year period, adult participants (including new families and those families who enrolled and later dropped out) have, on average, received 158 adult education and parenting contact hours over the three year period, including adult education, parenting education, and home visits. *It is worth noting that ASPIRE does not officially enroll families into the program until their third class visit; therefore, the average number of contact hours per family is slightly understated.*

Table 1: Families Served by ASPIRE, by Attendance Area, 1996-97

	Dawson	Travis Heights	Harris	Allison	Program Total
Returning families	11	5	8	4	28
New families	6	5	23	15	49
Total families	**17**	**10**	**31**	**19**	77

Table 2 summarizes the services delivered to children through the Early Childhood Component of the ASPIRE program in the 1996-97 school year, by attendance area.

Table 2: Early Childhood Education Classroom Hours, by Attendance Area, 1996-97*

	Dawson	Travis Heights	Harris	Program Total
Total # of children attending	16	12	20	51
Total # of hours attended	1403	1260	1602	4262
Average # of hours attended	87.69	105.00	80.10	83.57
Average # of classes attended	29	27	35	28

(*Includes all children who attended at least three ECE classes, and school-age children who attended a summer program in June and July)

COMPONENTS OF THE ASPIRE PROGRAM

The ASPIRE program developed by CIS adheres closely to the national Even Start model. The foundation of the program consists of three major instructional components:

- Adult Education and Literacy Classes – CIS conducts English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for adults at all locations, employing one full-time adult literacy teacher and one half-time instructor from Austin Community College (ACC). The ESL classes are intended as a gateway class for those adults who wish to pursue GED certification or other lifeskills goals. This component of the Even Start program is intended to impart skills to adults which will improve their chances in the job market and toward acquiring citizenship status, as well as give them the tools to help make their children successful learners.
- Early Childhood Education – CIS employs trained bilingual teachers and paraprofessionals in their child development classes. Children are divided into two age-appropriate groups (0-2 years, and 2+ years) for instruction. The curriculum and staff encourage children to think, reason, question, and experiment with language.
- Parenting Education/Parents and Children Together (PACT) Time – Parenting education is based on the Practical Parenting Curriculum. Parenting education is

amplified through the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) and Parents as Teachers (PAT) program. Language development is modeled by reading aloud to the early childhood group and their parents, then having the parent read to the child. This process is designed to encourage language development in the child, and to develop confidence and literacy skills within the parent, and promotes the idea that parents are their children's first teacher. After ceasing operations at the Allison site, more parenting education hours were added to the sites at Harris and Dawson.

EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In a departure from the first two years of the grant, an evaluation team was assembled prior to the beginning of the third year to address the diverse components of the program in greater depth. The evaluation team, including the program manager, met several times throughout the year to design, monitor, and discuss the progress of the evaluation.

- The adult education component of the grant was evaluated by John A. Wooley, M.Ed., of the Center for Initiatives in Education at Southwest Texas State University. Mr. Wooley has been involved with evaluation of the ASPIRE program since the first year of the grant and is an adult education provider.
- The early childhood education (ECE), parenting education, and PACT-time components were evaluated by Dr. Deborah Jacobvitz, Associate Professor in the College of Natural Sciences at the University of Texas, with the assistance of Danielle Crosby, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Human Ecology in the College of Natural Sciences. Dr. Jacobvitz has also contributed to the evaluation of the program since the first year, and is considered an expert in the field of attachment theory.
- Planning and coordination of the evaluation process and editing and assembly of the year-end report was the responsibility of Ralph Smith, M.Ed., of the Office of Program Evaluation at the Austin Independent School District.

The evaluation was guided by principles outlined in the 1990 Handbook of Adult Education. Texas A&M University's Texas Center for Adult Literacy and Learning encourages the use of this model to ensure consistency of Even Start evaluations within the State of Texas. The major components, including recommended data sources, are listed below.

Proof of Effect - What evidence exists that the program is having any desired effects?

(a) information from records of participants
(b) observations of program activities
(c) interviews with parents

Judgment Against Criteria - Are the goals and objectives of the program being met?

(a) comparing what was proposed with what has occurred, i.e., were classes, parenting activities, training, etc., held?
(b) interviews with staff and parents

Valuing - Who values the program, and why?

(a) interviews with participants
(b) interviews with selected personnel

Critical Questions - What questions arise for future program activities during the evaluation process?
(a) formulated during the year
(b) developed as a result of program activities

The team met early in the third year of the program to identify questions related to program efficacy and to formulate a strategy for conducting the evaluation. Measures and instruments were identified or created to collect data on the program for use in the evaluation. The methodologies used to address each program component and specific evaluation findings are discussed in the respective segments of this report.

The following evaluation questions were identified:

- To what extent do parenting classes use a variety of resources and materials to address the needs, interests, and concerns of the parent involved?
- To what extent does PACT time effectively focus parents' attention on children and provide opportunities to reinforce learning from parenting classes?
- To what extent do the parenting classes and parent-child interaction time strengthen the parent-child relationship by reducing overall stress in the parental role?
- To what extent do PACT time and monthly, organized activities encourage parental support for children's learning?
- To what extent do teachers model techniques during PACT time for encouraging children's language, imagination, and choice?
- To what extent do PACT time activities foster children's cognitive development?
- To what extent are the early childhood and adult components of the program integrated?

Other process-oriented evaluation questions that were also considered included:

- To what extent is the program being implemented as proposed?
- How well are program resources being employed to achieve program objectives?
- Do program procedures and activities match participants' needs?
- How successfully is the program achieving its objectives?

Outcome evaluation questions included:

- Do program participants believe they are better prepared and more confident about meeting their long-term goals?
- Do participants believe their basic academic skills are improving?
- Do participants read more since joining the program?
- What additional services or activities are needed to improve program outcomes?

EVALUATORS' FINDINGS

ADULT EDUCATION COMPONENT

Component Description

The adult education component at each site is based on a multilevel, English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) model. The instructional design includes large and small group instruction with individual assistance for those at the lowest literacy levels. Volunteers are generally in the classroom facilitating ability-level groups. This grouping system encourages the building of student support groups in each class and benefits both levels of students. The adult education program at all sites reflects a learner-centered approach designed to meet the needs of the individual learner and the family. The academic skills are taught in a manner consistent with those needs as defined by the goals set by the adult student. A small GED preparation class was established at Harris Elementary School toward the end of the 1996-97 school year.

Summary of Evaluator's Findings

Data were collected at various times during the year from:

- observations of all aspects of the program, including teaching, assessment, staff
- meetings with program staff, and related activities;
- interviews with staff;
- interviews with adult students (parents);
- review of family and individual student portfolios; and
- participation in staff development/discussion sessions.

Pretest data from the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) showed that approximately 86% of the population was at a beginning level, 5% at an intermediate level, and 9% at an advanced level. The percentage of beginning level students has greatly increased over years one and two. Unfortunately, the post-assessment was not administered consistently throughout the program. Due to the open entrance/open exit nature of the program, not all students were given a posttest upon leaving the program; yet in the client surveys, *participants stated that they were reading and writing significantly more since entering the ASPIRE program.*

Because 96% of the class was limited English proficient (LEP), including two students with no formal education in their native language, *adult classes concentrated on increasing speaking ability and attaining personal goals during the 1996-1997 school year at Harris.* Within one semester, most students had attained 50% of their personal goals. During the second semester, students mastered an additional 25-40% of their personal goals.

Because Even Start is a family literacy program, adult students' goals regarding their children were of primary importance. Almost 90% of students attained all their goals regarding their children. The majority of students completed 40 percent or more of their professional goals. Limited English proficiency caused the greatest barrier to obtaining these goals. LEP-status also delays the students' educational goals of earning a GED in English, or of participating more fully in the community. At the San José/Dawson locations, most students had been with the program longer and, thus, had greater oral English skills. ESL classes there addressed

speaking, reading, and writing abilities during the 1996-1997 school year. According to program staff, adult classes will address these goals more fully in the coming year.

As in the first two years, the parents in the Even Start Program and program staff at all sites were interviewed to determine their perspective on program effectiveness. Additionally, evaluators participated in staff meetings, conducted structured observations, and reviewed family and student portfolios at the sites. A sample of staff were interviewed regarding program achievements and recommendations for future activities.

This type of qualitative data is often supported by quantitative data such as pre/post tests, length of time in program, and the extent and nature of services utilized. Yet even quantitative data cannot show a true cause and effect relationship between the services offered and the gains made by Even Start participants. Due to the multitude of factors which affect the daily lives of the families involved, positive changes and program activities may be inferred, yet not definitively proven.

Parents were administered a survey during the last class week of 1997. Twenty-four responses were collected. With the exception of a very few individuals who responded they were new to the program, all respondents indicated that the ASPIRE Even Start Program is having a positive impact on their lives. Some findings from the survey include:

- New families first become aware of the program from two sources, either families and friends (55%) or from school brochures (45%).
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) indicated that they thought their experience in the ASPIRE program would help them gain employment, and over one-third (37%) indicated that they planned to attend more school.
- 65% of the respondents indicated that they helped their children with homework more than they did before enrolling in the program.
- Before enrolling in the program, 95% of parents responding to the survey indicated that they read no more than one-half hour a week to their children; upon conclusion of the program, 48% indicated that the read at least an hour per week to their children.
- Eighty-nine percent indicated that obtaining a GED was a personal goal.

Early Childhood Education Component

Component Description

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) component of the ASPIRE program provides child development classes for the preschool-aged children of families enrolled in the ASPIRE program. During the 1996-97 year, ECE classes were 2-1/4 hours in length and were held biweekly at each site. Under the supervision of a trained, bilingual staff, children participated in a variety of activities that promote children's cognitive, social and emotional development. Activities included a range of learning centers, reading and literacy activities, outdoor play, art, and sensory activities.

In addition to providing a high quality environment which fosters children's emotional and intellectual growth, ASPIRE child development classes provided a safe, nurturing place for parents to leave their children during ESL and parenting education classes, an important service largely lacking in other adult education programs in the Austin area. Providing quality childcare enables parents to more fully participate in program activities. This component of the program also serves as a valuable introduction for children and families to the school experience. See

Table 3 for a description of the number of children served by the early childhood education program during the 1996-97 year.

Table 3: Number of Children Served by the Early Childhood Education, PAT, and HIPPY Programs, 1996-97

Age Ranges Served by Programs	Number Served
Ages 2 months - 3 years served in Early Childhood Education and PAT programs	33
Ages 4-5 years served in Early Childhood Education and HIPPY programs	35
Total Served	68

Early Childhood Education Objectives

In following the overall program goal of preparing children and their families for school, the ECE component of the ASPIRE program has the following objectives:

1. To provide a high-quality early childhood classroom equipped with appropriate materials, supplies and equipment and staffed by well-trained early childhood teachers;
2. To create a program curriculum that demonstrates an awareness of child development and strives to respond to the growth and development process of individual children; and,
3. To encourage the emergent literacy of children through the use of various strategies in the classroom and help prepare children for future success in school.

Methodology

A variety of methods were used to evaluate the extent to which the ECE component of the ASPIRE program met its objectives during the 1996-97 program year. Data have been collected each year from September, 1995 until September, 1997 through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods including observations, interviews, and surveys. The specific measures used are described below.

In the absence of a controlled experimental design, the base questions surrounding program effectiveness cannot be answered with a high degree of certainty, due to the unknown effects of other confounding, uncontrolled variables. For example, we cannot ethically randomly choose some people for the program while denying others this intervention. Consequently, there may be self-selection factors at play, such as people staying in the program who are either already coping better or, conversely, in crisis so that they are more desperate for help and open to change. For the ECE portion of the evaluation, descriptive rather than inferential analyses were used, given the nature of the observational data. The following measures were used to assess the ECE component:

NAEYC Early Childhood Program Description – The Early Childhood Program Description (ECPD) is an instrument created by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to assess the extent to which a program meets criteria indicative of a high quality early childhood classroom environment. The instrument provides an

extensive and detailed description of the program in the areas of: a) interactions among staff and children; b) curriculum; c) staff-parent interactions; d) staff qualifications and development; e) administration; f) staffing patterns; g) physical environment; h) health and safety; i) nutrition and food service; and j) evaluation. For each criterion, programs are evaluated on a three point scale as to whether they *meet, partially meet* or *do not meet* the criterion. The ECPD measure is used by the NAEYC in its accreditation process of early childhood programs and has also been used to evaluate Head Start classrooms.

The ECPD was chosen because its comprehensiveness provides valuable, detailed feedback as to a program's strengths and weakness. For the purposes of this evaluation, the ECPD was used to assess the areas of: (a) interactions among staff and children, (b) curriculum, (g) the physical environment, and (h) health and safety practices. A discussion of the rationale for selecting these components appears in Appendix A. The program was rated on a total of 64 criteria for a total of 192 possible points.

The program description was completed by a graduate student in the field of Child Development at the University of Texas-Austin with three years of teaching experience in an accredited early childhood program and experience using the ECPD instrument for program evaluation. The ECPD was completed through seven hours of classroom observations, a review of the classroom lesson plans and child portfolios on file, and meetings with the ASPIRE ECE lead teacher. Based on these assessments, a cumulative score was calculated to reflect the extent of the program's compliance with the 64 quality criteria established in the NAEYC-ECPD measure.

Case Study Observations of Program Students. – Undergraduate students majoring in Child Development at the University of Texas completed detailed observations of children in the classroom. Case studies are a useful tool for capturing the progress of individual children in the class. Over the course of two years, observers (2-3 observers per semester) completed a total of 900 hours of observations, resulting in 10 case studies. Observers were instructed to take notes on a selected child each day they observed. In addition, each observer spent some portion of the day interacting with the child, noting her observations at a later time. After weeks of observing one child, a case study describing the child's abilities in the following areas were noted: language, interactions with teachers, interactions with mother, cognitive and problem-solving skills, motivation and enthusiasm for challenging tasks. When possible, the mother's parenting behaviors were also noted.

Children were chosen at random for observation; however, for the final evaluation report (1997-98) two case studies will be highlighted. The case studies concern two children for whom the most complete observational data was acquired. It is notable that these children were also considered particularly challenging by the staff. Students completing the case studies worked under the direct supervision of Dr. Deborah Jacobvitz, who observed the children as well and analyzed the case studies.

ASPIRE Survey for School-Aged Children – This survey was created to assess the school performance of children, age four and over, who have been served through ASPIRE and have since entered school. Surveys were distributed to children's elementary school teachers who were asked to assess development in the areas of emotion, social competence, academic skills, physical skills, language and cultural knowledge.

Summary of Evaluator's Findings

Presented here are evaluation questions addressing the extent to which the program is meeting the three primary goals of its ECE component. Evaluation findings and their implications are presented along with each question. It is important to note that for the evaluation findings reported below, data from the individual program sites, San José/Dawson and Harris, have been collapsed. The decision to combine the findings of the two sites was based on the fact that the sites share staff, administration, resources, and an overarching philosophy. Classroom observations confirm that the procedures, materials, and characteristics of both sites are very similar. It should be mentioned that this consistency of quality across sites has been a specific goal of program administrators over the past year.

Providing a High-Quality Classroom

To what extent do ASPIRE early childhood classrooms and staff meet established criteria for quality early childhood programs?

The ECE classrooms at both program sites fully or partially meet all of the criteria outlined in the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Description in the areas of staff/children interactions, curriculum, physical environment, and health and safety practices. For each of 64 criteria on the ECPD, classrooms were given a rating of "1" for criterion not met, "2" for criterion partially met, and "3" for criterion fully met. *Out of a possible total rating of 192, the ASPIRE ECE program was given a 190.5 rating by the observer* (see Table 4). See Appendix A for a complete list of the criteria utilized, as well as an explanation of why three specific criteria were omitted for this evaluation.

Table 4: Classroom Ratings on the Early Childhood Program Description

	Staff-Child Interactions	Curriculum	Physical Environment	Health & Safety	Total
Rating (possible pts.)	45 (45)	62.5 (63)	32 (33)	51 (51)	190.5 (192)
Percentage	100%	99%	97%	100%	99%

To what extent does the program curriculum reflect a knowledge of the principles of child development?

- Classroom observations reveal the constant use of developmentally appropriate practice in interactions between staff and children. Staff encourage children's self-expression and independence and speak to children in ways that foster self-esteem and pro-social behavior. Staff also use positive methods of guidance and set realistic limits for children given their ages.
- Classroom observations and a review of lesson plans reveal that age-appropriate activities and materials are in use. Weekly activity units reinforce learning of basic concepts through stories, songs, group time activities, outdoor activities, art, learning centers, cooking activities, and field trips. This is particularly impressive given the age range of the children participating. The program accommodates children aged 2 months

to 5 years (or until the child enters a Pre-K program). During the summer, the program is also open to school-aged children.

- Curriculum also reflects the recognition that children benefit from a multicultural approach that includes representations of themselves and their families. The program's adherence to this principle is evident in multicultural materials (e.g. puzzles, pictures, art materials, dolls) and activities (e.g. music, discussion of international foods, self-portraits).

Meeting the Needs of Individual Children

Are program activities designed in response to the growth and development processes of individual children?

- A review of lesson plans, as well as an interview with the ECE lead teacher, reveals a comprehensive, multistep process for meeting the developmental needs of individual children. (See Appendix A.) High levels of interaction among the ECE teacher, the home visitor, and parents result in a written learning prescription for each child. This learning prescription is then used to guide activities in both the classroom and the family's home to meet the child's specific developmental needs.
- The ECE teacher also maintains a portfolio for each child that documents the child's progress over the year. The portfolio includes samples of the child's work as well as observations made by the ECE staff.

Facilitating Emergent Literacy and Future School Adjustment

To what extent do ECE teachers and activities encourage the emergent literacy of children? How effective are these efforts?

- Classroom observations indicate that staff encourage and positively reinforce children's use of language. Staff ask children many open-ended questions which elicit a more elaborate verbal response from the children than a "yes" or "no." Staff also encourage children to "use their words" to communicate, and the children's progress in language is met with support and praise from the teachers.
- Classroom observations also indicate that ECE staff continually label objects around the room. Such labeling familiarizes children with the language that describes the world around them and reinforces their learning of vocabulary. As Spanish is the first language of many of the children, the labeling is done in both Spanish and English. This bilingual approach is appropriate because it helps the Spanish-speaking children become comfortable in the classroom and encourages literacy in their native language. At the same time, having English spoken in the classroom helps children acquire the English language skills that will be needed for school.
- Observational data from the end of the school year reveal signs that the children have acquired receptive language skills in English. When staff communicated in English (e.g. giving instructions for an activity), children for the most part responded appropriately, indicating comprehension. Children were also observed to alternate between Spanish and English in their own interactions.

To what extent does the program provide parents and children with a positive introduction to the school environment?

- Classroom observations suggest that ECE staff strive to make both parents and children comfortable in the classroom environment by welcoming children and parents to the classroom; being supportive in the transition to school process; assisting the children with separation from parents; and allowing parents to stay until they feel ready to leave their child.
- Observations from the end of the school year reveal that children and parents exhibit familiarity and comfort with ECE staff and the classroom itself suggesting a positive attitude towards separating from each other and towards the school environment. Children also appear to remain involved and active in the classroom throughout the day indicating an enjoyment and eagerness regarding the classroom environment. The only children observed to have difficulty joining the class at the beginning of the day were children who had not consistently attended the program in the weeks prior to observation.

PARENTING EDUCATION AND PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION TIME (PACT)

Component Description

The parent education component of ASPIRE involves weekly parenting classes and biweekly, supervised Parents and Children Together (PACT) time. These two components are designed to provide support to participants in their role as parents and facilitate effective family interaction.

Parenting Classes

ASPIRE parenting classes, provided by the Pebble Project child-abuse prevention agency, are held biweekly and are available to parents in either Spanish or English. Parenting classes are based on the Practical Parent Education curriculum (Leslie-Johnson & Weimer, 1995). This curriculum consists of seven basic sections:

- Understanding Your Role as Parent
- Developing Trust Within Families
- Communicating Within the Family
- Building Self-Esteem Within the Family
- Understanding Parenting and Power
- Accepting and Growing Through Natural Transitions in the Life-Cycle, and
- Accepting and Growing Through Unexpected Transitions in the Life-Cycle.

Each section contains several more specific topic modules for a total of 36 modules in all (See Appendix B for sample list of modules covered during the 1996-97 year). Each module includes material suggestions, resources, lesson objectives, group discussion questions, extender activities, and suggested readings for parents. In 1997, the Pebble Project received an award for excellence from the Texas Association of School Boards' Practical Parent Education Program.

Parents and Children Together (PACT) Time

Each PACT-time session is structured so that parents and children spend some time reading together, participate in group activities led by the ECE teacher, and then work on an art or science activity together. This time provides an opportunity for parents to put into practice things they have learned and discussed in parenting classes. PACT time also provides an

opportunity for children and parents to communicate, work cooperatively, and participate in each other's learning, all in a supportive environment.

Homevisits

ASPIRE provides home-based family education and assessment of family needs through two nationally established home-visiting programs. The Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) serves families with children ages 3-5 years and the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program serves families with children from 0 to 5 years of age (although the program is currently serving children ages 0-5 at the Harris site. Participants in HIPPY receive three home visits monthly and PAT participants receive one visit monthly.

The aim of the HIPPY program is to provide educational enrichment to infants and young children, while promoting an increased awareness in parents of their own strengths and potential as home educators. The home visit model stresses the importance of the parental role in helping children transition into school and develop confidence in their abilities throughout the primary grades. Home educators provide families with materials and activities designed to increase the achievement levels of their young children, preparing them for the transition to school. Educators spend many hours working with parents on how they can best facilitate their child's learning.

Similar to the HIPPY program, Parents as Teachers (PAT) focuses on strengthening and expanding the parent-child relationship. Whereas the HIPPY curriculum concentrates on how parents and children can best prepare for the upcoming transition to school, the PAT curriculum centers on educating parents about their developing child and working with parents and children to facilitate positive, healthy, family interaction.

HIPPY and PAT home educators complete extensive training in their respective program models. HIPPY educators complete six hours of training per week and work under close supervision of the HIPPY coordinator, who has over 20 years of experience in elementary education. All of the PAT educators have completed masters' degrees in a related field.

Parent Education Objectives

In keeping with the program goal of helping parents become their child's first and best teacher, the objectives of the parent education component of the program are:

- To strengthen the parent-child relationship by providing opportunities for positive, guided interaction between parents and children, reinforcing the learning in parenting classes, and home visits.
- To foster the role of parent-as-teacher, increasing parent involvement in children's education, and encouraging the literacy and language skills of both parents and children.

Methodology

Classroom Observations A graduate student in Child Development at the University of Texas at Austin observed PACT time at each of the sites for a total of one-and-a- half hours. Notes were made as to how parents and children interacted and how staff facilitated these interactions.

Parenting Stress Index A major goal of Even Start's parent training and home-based programs for parents and children is to improve the quality of care parents provide their children

and to foster the healthy development of children. A growing body of research has shown that improvements in parenting quality are related to reductions in the stress that caregivers experience in the parenting role and increases in parents' sense of competence. Reductions in parenting stress, as assessed by the Parenting Stress Index, have been related empirically with a reduced likelihood of child abuse and an increased likelihood of attachment security in the parent-child relationship.

Three independent longitudinal studies following mothers and their children over time have found that increases in maternal sensitivity were correlated with an increase in social and emotional support available to the mother (Crockenberg, 1981; Crockenberg & McClusky, 1986; Quinton, Rutter & Liddle, 1984). Moreover, declines in the quality of care mothers provide their children have been linked to the stress they experience stemming either from the parenting role or other stressful life circumstances (Egeland, Breitenbucher & Rosenberg, 1980). This research suggests that the fundamental challenge for any intervention program is to foster parents' sense of competence and reduce the stress they feel in the parenting role.

The parent training and home-based programs for parents and children are designed to help parents understand their children's emotional and cognitive needs and to provide parents with emotional and instrumental support. It was anticipated that such support would help reduce the stress parents experience in the parenting role, reducing their levels of depression and increasing caregiving quality and children's attachment security.

The Parenting Stress Index (PSI), has been administered four times to a group of mothers over a two-year period. Mothers completed the PSI twice each year, once in the fall, shortly after they entered the program, and again in the early spring. A bilingual research assistant provided the mothers with both verbal and written instructions and read each question aloud.

The PSI was developed for parents of children who are older than two years. Thus, two additional versions of the PSI were created by deleting items not relevant for infants, ages birth through eight months or between eight months and two years. Finally, Abidin has translated the PSI into Spanish to be used with Hispanics residing in New York. This Spanish version was modified to the dialect of Hispanics in Austin, Texas whose linguistic roots are from Mexico.

A total of 66 mothers completed the PSI at least once over the two years. The number of mothers who completed the PSI varied at each administration for several reasons. Mothers entered the ASPIRE program at different times. For example, 43 of the 66 mothers entered the program six months after the first PSI administration had taken place. In addition, some mothers were no longer in the ASPIRE program by the fourth PSI administration. Thus, of the 66 mothers who completed the PSI, 36 mothers completed the questionnaire twice, 13 mothers completed the questionnaire three times and four mothers completed the questionnaire at all four time periods.

The Parenting Stress Index (PSI) is a self-report questionnaire, originally constructed by Abidin (1976) to assess the determinants of dysfunctional parenting. The PSI consists of 101 items rated on 5-point scales (1= strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree) that assess the total stress a parent experiences due to certain salient child characteristics, parental characteristics, and situational variables which were directly related to the role of being a parent. Scores are computed for 14 scales--6 in the child domain, 7 in the parent domain, and a Total Stress Score, which is the sum of the ratings for all 101 items. Subscales in the child domain include: 1) adaptability; 2) acceptability; 3) demandingness; 4) mood; 5) distractibility/hyperactivity; and 6) reinforces parent. Subscales in the parent domain include: 1) depression; 2) attachment; 3) restrictions

imposed by the parental role; 4) sense of competence; 5) social isolation; 6) relationship with spouse; and 7) parent health. Examples of items include: "I feel trapped by my responsibilities as a parent," "I enjoy being a parent," "I have had many more problems raising children than I expected" and "When I run into a problem taking care of my children, I have a lot of people to whom I can talk to get help or advice," "I feel capable and on top of thing when I am caring for my child." The PSI also has 19 items that assess stressful life events, such as substantial decrease in income, divorce, and beginning a new job. Reliability coefficients based on a sample of 2,633 parents ranged in magnitude from .70 to .83 for the subscales of the child domain and from .70 to .84 for the subscales of the parent domain. Test-retest reliability in a study of 54 parents was .77 for the child domain, .69 for the parent domain and .88 for the Total Stress Score.

The PSI has been used widely and shows impressive construct validity. Parents' scores on the PSI have been shown to distinguish between parents who do and do not abuse their children (Mash, 1983) and has differentiated children who form secure attachments to their mothers and fathers from those who become insecurely attached (Hart, 1985). In addition, parents' PSI scores when their infants were eight months old has predicted emotional and behavioral problems in their children at age five (McGaughey, 1986). The PSI subscale "restrictions imposed by the parental role" was shown to be strongly related to children's adaptive functioning in school (Prinz, et al, 1983).

Review of Practical Parent Education Curriculum A doctoral student in Child Development at the University of Texas at Austin reviewed the Practical Parent Education curriculum used by the parent educators. She also interviewed the program parent educators.

Summary of Evaluator's Findings

Strengthening and Promoting Optimal Parent-Child Relationships

To what extent do parenting classes use a variety of resources and materials to address the needs, interests, and concerns of the parent involved?

Parent educators appear sensitive and responsive to the needs of participating parents. A variety of materials and resources are integrated into the curriculum to meet specific needs.

- A review of the Practical Parent Education (PPE) curriculum used to organize ASPIRE parenting classes reveals the use of a variety of materials including individual activities (e.g. having parents construct a reflection of their perceived role in the family), large and small group activities (e.g. discussions), role plays (e.g. how to communicate with children), and readings.
- The PPE curriculum also offers a variety of topics to be covered in the parenting classes; however, parent educators do not limit the classes to the PPE curriculum. At the beginning of the course, parents are asked about their concerns and interests regarding parenting. Parent educators then integrate additional materials to ensure that the curriculum meets the specific interests of the participants.
- Participant evaluations of the parenting classes indicate that all of the parents surveyed (18 parents in total) found the class to be beneficial for themselves and their children. When asked to describe how the classes had been useful, parents spontaneously mentioned the responses in Table 5:

Table 5: Parent Satisfaction Survey-Benefits to Family

RESPONSE	# of PARENTS
Having more positive discipline/ problem-solving techniques with their children	9
Improved communication in the family	8
Better able to teach/educate their children	8
Closer relationship with their children	7
Better able to understand their children	6
Giving more time, trust, care and respect to their children	6
Increased patience with children	5
Increased confidence as a parent	1
Feel like a model for children to follow	1

Verbatim examples of the responses reported above are:

> *"Well, my two small children fought a lot and I asked for advice in this class and they helped me a lot. I gave a game/toy that is the same to each one or I had them take turns playing."*

> *"[classes helped me to] be a better mother and wife and how to handle myself and relate to my children when I have problems or I'm depressed."*

Responses suggest that parents have been highly satisfied with the ASPIRE parenting classes and believe that the classes have had a significant impact on their family lives.

In the ASPIRE parent satisfaction survey (administered individually from the parenting class evaluation survey), 39 parents (95.1%) reported that they enjoyed the classes somewhat (29.3%) or very much (65.9%). The two remaining parents (4.9%) reported that they rarely attended the classes.

To what extent does PACT-time effectively focus parents' attention on children and provide opportunities to reinforce learning from parenting classes?

- Classroom observations reveal that PACT-time activities encourage parents to work with their children. For example, on one of the days of observation, parents and children worked together to create a book of colors by cutting out pictures from magazines. Parents and children were observed discussing the different colors they saw and how they planned to make their book. This activity seemed to provide the opportunity for parents and children to participate in positive, cooperative interaction with each other.
- Observations also indicate that staff actively encourage parent-child interaction and parental responsiveness. If parents were absorbed in the project, staff would ask questions or make comments that redirected parents' and children's attention toward working together. For example, during one observation, parents and children were making a sock puppet together. One of the mothers seemed particularly involved in the project and her concentration for what she was doing seemed to minimize the communication and interaction with her child. The ECE teacher was able to reengage mother and child by asking each some questions about what they were doing and providing encouragement.

To what extent do the parenting classes and parent-child interaction time strengthen the parent-child relationship by reducing overall stress in the parental role?

- The ASPIRE Parent Satisfaction Survey indicates that the majority of participants believe the ASPIRE programs have improved their relationships with their children. The specific responses are summarized in Table 6:

Table 6: Parents' Beliefs that ASPIRE Led to Improved Relationships with Their Children

Response	# Parents	Percent of Parents
Not at all	3	7.3
A little	0	0
Somewhat	5	12.2
Much	31	74.6
Did not answer	2	4.9

- *Parenting Stress Index Findings*

The PSI data from all four phases will be presented. Data for mothers who participated in Even Start over two time periods, and over three time periods, are reported separately. Also, since the intervention provided by Even Start/ASPIRE focused on parenting, the sources of stress that contribute to parenting directly and indirectly are reported in separate tables. Thus, the data will be presented in four ways, including:

1) change in the level of stress mothers experience due to child characteristics and child rearing dimensions at two time periods;
2) change in the level of stress mothers experience due to parent characteristics not directly related to the child (e.g., social isolation, parental depression) over two time periods;
3) change in the level of stress mothers experience due to child characteristics and childrearing dimensions over three time periods; and
4) change in the level of stress mothers experience due to parent characteristics not directly related to the child (e.g., social isolation, parental depression) over three time periods.

Paired *t*-tests were used to compare the PSIs completed by the 29 mothers who completed the assessment shortly after they entered the program and again 8 months later. ***A statistically significant decline occurred in the total level of parental stress due to child characteristics and child rearing*** (see Appendix C).

Mothers also reported statistically significant reductions in stress due to two child characteristics, Adaptability and Hyperactivity/Distractibility, over the two time periods. First, mothers indicated that their children were more adaptable; that is, the child handled change and transitions more easily, showing less stubbornness and passive noncompliance when asked to do something different. In addition, mothers felt that their energy was not continually drained by the child's hyperactivity and distractibility. There was a statistical trend for mothers to experience their child as less demanding and more acceptable over the two time periods. Specifically, mothers were less likely to experience their child's bids for attention as intrusions and demandingness and reported that their child was less aggressive and openly defiant.

A statistically significant trend also occurred for a decline in stress due to two child characteristics, Child Acceptability and Child Reinforces the Parent, which are interactive types of variables involving impacts on the parents' personality and sense of self. After

participation in the ASPIRE program, mothers reported that their child was closer to what they had hoped for the child (i.e., they gave higher ratings to dimensions associated with socially desirable characteristics). In addition, mothers reported that their interaction with the child was more likely to result in a positive emotional response (e.g., "Child Reinforces Parent" scale). This response is a central component of the bonding process and it develops as a function of both the signals which the child emits and the parents' ability to accurately read the child's cues. This child characteristic is considered vital in motivating the parent to sustain interest in and to provide service to the child. No statistically significant differences emerged in child moodiness, parental attachment which taps the parents' motivation to fulfill their role as a parent, parents' sense of competence and feelings of being restricted in the parental role.

Mothers reported a slight (but not statistically significant) decline in total stress due to parent characteristics not directly related to child rearing (e.g., parental depression, social isolation, health and relationship with spouse). A statistically significant decline did occur in the stress mothers experience in their relationship with their spouse over the two times. No significant differences were found for change in stress due to maternal depression, social isolation or health. Mothers also reported reductions in depression and increases in their sense of competence. Declines in depression and an increase in self-competence not only aid the mother in coping with her life in general, but specifically, allow her to be emotionally available to her child. (See Appendix C.)

Next, a within-subjects general linear model was used to assess change in mothers' levels of stress over the first three time periods of participation in the ASPIRE program. ***Mothers' total level of stress due to child related variables showed a statistically significant decline over the three time periods.*** In addition, mothers' level of stress due to child-related characteristics and child rearing dimensions showed statistically significant reductions over the three time periods in three of the five areas of stress due to child characteristics (e.g., acceptability, demandingness, child is reinforcing to parent) and two of the three sources of stress due to child rearing dimensions, parents' attachment to child and parents' sense of competence. Specifically, over time, parents were more like to endorse items related to socially desirable characteristics in their children, to report that they found their child's bids for attention less demanding, and to experience having a child as reinforcing. In addition, ***mothers felt more attached to their children over time and experienced a heightened sense of competence in the parental role***. Change in child adaptability, distractibility and moodiness, and restrictions in the parental role did not reach statistical significance.

Finally, PSI outcomes show that only change in stress due to the parent's health produced a nonsignificant trend. No statistically significant differences were found for change in total stress and stress due to parental depression, social isolation, and relationship with spouse over the three time periods. These results may stem from the fact that the ASPIRE program is not designed to assist adults in these areas, but rather is focused on improving their parenting skills. The fact that changes were found only in the areas targeted by the program (and not in the other areas) suggests that the significant differences found cannot be attributed simply to the mother's mood or a tendency to answer questions in a socially desirable way. (See Appendix C.)

Fostering Parental Involvement in Children's Education

To what extent do PACT-time and monthly organized activities encourage parental support for children's learning?

- Observations and a review of lesson plans indicate that PACT-time activities are designed to foster parental participation in children's learning. For example, PACT-time

usually begins with parents and children reading books together until everyone arrives and is settled. Then the ECE teacher reads a story to the group, asking questions and encouraging input from children and parents. This activity centers on parents and children learning and working together. Parents were observed asking their children questions pertaining to the story and helping their child participate in a group situation.

- PACT activities reinforce the learning in both ECE and ESL classes aimed at increasing English comprehension and vocabulary by integrating basic concepts such as numbers, colors, foods and shapes.
- Observational data reveal that parents are actively involved with their children during PACT-time activities. Parents were observed asking their children questions pertaining to the group time story and helping their child participate in a group situation.
- Every month, the ASPIRE program orchestrates activities that foster parental support for children's learning. Some of the activities have included field trips to area museums (i.e. children's, art, and natural history museums), libraries, the zoo, and local parks. These trips allow families to visit places in the community together that they might otherwise not have the opportunity to visit. The field trips can launch, complement, or build on the curriculular theme. In addition to field trips, program celebrations and recognition ceremonies are also planned throughout the year. These activities serve the important function of helping families celebrate their achievements. They also provide the opportunity for families to interact with other families and encourage a sense of belonging.

To what extent do teachers model techniques during PACT-time for encouraging children's language, imagination, and choice?

- Staff have been observed to regularly reinforce children for using language to communicate, to ask children open-ended questions, and to encourage age-appropriate independence. These techniques used by the staff serve as examples to parents for how they can foster their child's development in the areas of language, imagination and choice.
- Classroom observations reveal that staff almost always communicate to children and parents in English, and then repeat in Spanish if needed. It is important to note that observations were done in the spring near the end of the school year, suggesting that at this point PACT-time activities could occur primarily in English.
- Observational data indicate that parents discuss group time stories with their children and encourage children to answer questions as the ECE teacher does. In addition, parents and children were observed communicating with each other in both Spanish and English.
- Classroom observations and a review of lesson plans indicate that PACT time activities support the learning of basic concepts (e.g. colors, counting, shapes). They encourage children's use of basic vocabulary as well as promote reading as a fun, worthwhile activity. Joint art activities during PACT time encourage children's manipulation of a variety of objects and their engagement in problem-solving and creative expression.

PROGRESS TOWARD PROGRAM PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

The ten performance objectives that were submitted to the Texas Education Agency as part of the 1996-97 continuation proposal are based on a fully funded program that would operate for twelve months.

1. Identification and Recruitment of Eligible Children - Forty-nine new families were identified and recruited into the ASPIRE Even Start Program. *Objective met.*
2. Screening and Preparation of Participation and Referrals to Other Agencies - The 49 families all participated in the intake process. Intake procedures include a base line assessment of skills, a goals inventory, an individualized educational plan, and an assessment of barriers that might hinder full participation. The intake procedures insure proper referral to appropriate community agencies. Target goal was assessments of 25 new families. With the carryover of 46 families from years one and two, this *objective was met.*
3. Design of Program and Provision of Support Services - The ASPIRE Even Start program is providing a wide range of support services to insure the retention of participants. These include on-site childcare at all locations, class locations that are easily accessible to Capital Metro bus lines, bus passes for those families who use the bus, counseling and referral systems for participating families, and a willingness by the program staff to adjust program activities to meet the needs of the participants. The operating times for the centers have been modified to maximize participation. The area of support services is a proven strength of all Communities in Schools programs that have been observed. There is strong evidence that this target *objective has been met.*
4. Establishment of Instructional Programs - The instructional program is based on a four-part model (i.e., adult education, early childhood education, parents and children together, (PACT), and home based instruction). Both quantitative and qualitative data sources were used to ascertain progress in this objective. Quantitative data include pre/post assessment, portfolios, teacher observation and documentation of attendance and home visits. Qualitative data sources included client and staff interviews and observation by evaluation staff.

   During the 1996-97 year, staff noted individual and family accomplishments in the staffing notes and portfolios, as in the following examples:

   Allison Site
   -Improved self confidence
   -English improved or increased use of English
   -Obtained library card
   -Behavior of children in school improving
   -Parent working in school as monitor

   Dawson Site
   -Working on GED
   -Improved English/speak English more
   -Obtained library card
   -Made speech for United Way
   -Involved in community action
   -Writing skills improved

-Paper in Buen Samaritano Class
-Teenage daughters returned to finish school

Harris Site
-Obtained driver's license
-Translating for schools' staff (acting as mediator)
-Increased self-confidence
-Family unity
-Improved writing skills; more confidence in writing
-Reading comprehension improved
-English improved
-Obtained library card
-Found full-time job
-Attended PTA meeting

5. Staff Training - The CIS Even Start adult education teachers have taken full advantage of the many resources available to them through ASPIRE partnering agencies (e.g., Austin Community College, Austin Independent School District, Parents as Teachers, the Home Instruction Program for Pre-School Youngsters program, and other Communities in Schools programs); the Adult Education Professional Development and Curriculum Consortium; and the Texas Family Literacy Assistance Center. During year two, ASPIRE facilitated the development of a regional Even Start consortium to maximize resources and share common concerns. This has opened other avenues for staff development. The average number of hours for staff development per staff was 125 hours, not including on-site technical assistance or the bimonthly cross-training each staff member enjoys. This is remarkable when compared to traditional regular adult education programs. Staff members are polled on a regular basis to insure practical and timely training. What is especially notable in the CIS Even Start program is the effort to insure that all staff members not only have the opportunity to partake in all variety of staff development options, but also are actively encouraged to learn all aspects of the program. This type of cross training promotes an integrated program that does not place one component above another. *Objectives not only met but greatly exceeded.*

6. Provision and Monitoring of Integrated Instructional Services - This program has adjusted readily to the needs of its participants. This has led to revised class schedules and relocation of program resources, shifts in activity schedules, and changes in personnel to best meet the needs of the program. It is this sensitivity and flexibility that leads the evaluation team to believe that the ASPIRE Even Start program will continue to be a valuable resource to the City of Austin and to AISD. *Objective met.*

7. Operation Year-round Program Operation - The ASPIRE Even Start program met throughout the grant period of September 1, 1996 to August 31, 1997. This program followed a slightly modified Austin Independent School District calendar in order to meet the training and staff development needs of its professional staff. The ASPIRE program held classes 42 weeks during the school year. *Objective met.*

8. Coordination with Other Services and Programs - ASPIRE Even Start has established an excellent record of establishing partnerships with agencies with proven track records.

The program has met or exceeded the objective criteria established in the original proposal. ASPIRE's collaborative partners, and the services they provide, include:

- Austin Community College – *One adult teacher, assessment of adult education students*
- National Council of Jewish Women – *Funding of HIPPY license*
- Austin Independent School District – *Evaluation services; classroom space; PAT project personnel*
- San José Catholic Church – *Classroom space at a reduced rate*
- Sustainable Food Center – *Cooking and nutrition classes including teachers and materials.*
- Pebble Project – *Parenting Classes*

As evidenced by other sections of this evaluation, the program has established linkages with other service providers in the Central Texas area to greatly expand the options and opportunities available to its participants. ASPIRE referred families and students in the program for four general reasons: additional adult education classes; parenting classes and seminars; child-related services through AISD and City of Austin agencies; and general support services. Examples of support services provided by external agencies during the 1996-97 year include:

- Fourteen students were referred to additional Adult Education Classes. They were referred to Literacy Austin for tutoring and individual instruction, ACC for additional classes, Austin Housing Authority and El Buen Samaritano.
- Three families were referred for parenting-related classes on nutrition and other issues with the Sustainable Food Center and CEDEN.
- Eleven children and families were referred to AISD and the City of Austin for tutoring, early childhood education classes, and therapy. The agencies listed in the staffing notes include: AISD reading tutor, AISD ECE classes, AISD OT/PT (Occupational Therapy/Physical Therapy), RAYS, and AISD middle and high school programs for older children's educational needs, the City of Austin's Victory tutorial program, and ECI (Early Childhood Intervention).
- Twenty-one families were referred to a number of support services and agencies, including: transportation (bus passes), translation services, City of Austin and Seton Health Clinics, Skippy Express medical and eye exams, counseling and social work support, Austin Tenants Council, CIS or other counseling agencies, sources of free or cheap furniture, Child Care Management System for free childcare, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, MHMR, and legal aid services.

Objective met.

9. Serving Those Families Most In Need of Activities and Services - In the four school attendance areas, the "most in need" population continues to be young Hispanic adults with children who are unable to partake in many community activities due to their limited English skills. The ASPIRE Even Start Program clearly serves the "most in need" population. *Objective met.*

10. Independent Evaluation of the Program – The collaboration of four individuals representing three external entities indicates that *this objective was met.*

The ASPIRE program is valued by participants who repeatedly expressed their beliefs that the program was significantly helping them reach their goals. Program staff also value the

program and when interviewed, volunteered that they enjoy the "shared mission, the opportunity to help people and establish links with the community," and the relationships they have established with families both on site and through home visits. Additionally, many staff expressed the belief that the Even Start program was providing quality services that meet real needs in the local community.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

What questions arise for future program activities during the evaluation process?

At the end of the second year several recommendations were made for the 1996-97 grant cycle. The evaluation team recommended that services in program year 1996-97 should be restricted to Harris Elementary and the two areas served by the San José Church site (Dawson and Travis Heights Elementary) in order to emphasize the quality of services over quantity. In January 1997 ASPIRE redeployed staff and resources from Allison to Harris. This improved the quality of services provided at Harris greatly and made for more efficient use of staff and resources. Allison continued to receive services through August. In June, ASPIRE moved from San José Church to Dawson Elementary. As a result, ASPIRE was positioned to take greater advantage of the school resources.

The evaluation team recommended that ASPIRE continue the integration of the adult and early children activities within PACT time. The degree of integration between the various components has been significantly increased during this program year.

The ASPIRE coordinator requested a restructuring of the outside evaluation process to include Austin Independent School District in the evaluation team, previously comprised of faculty and graduate students from the University of Texas at Austin and Southwest Texas State University. This move allowed the program to take full advantage of AISD's evaluation office's expertise and provided ASPIRE a generous in-kind service.

Program Strengths

- The ASPIRE program provides high quality, in-depth services for each family. The average number of hours of service each family received was substantial and the quality of the services provided has been impressive.
- Services are carefully tailored to the needs of individual families, with the needs and progress made by parents and children carefully tracked and modifications made as needed.
- The ASPIRE program provides a diverse array of services to help improve parenting skills and to foster children's social and cognitive development and their literacy skills. Specifically, ASPIRE provides parenting classes, home visits, and classes with parents and children together that focus on the quality of their interaction, and a high quality, early childhood classroom responsive to the growth and development of each child.
- As a result of the quality of service and amount of service provided to each family, mothers experienced an impressive reduction in stress due to child characteristics and childrearing. Such reductions have been demonstrated in other studies to predict children's ability to make friends as well as their academic success in school.
- ASPIRE encourages the emergent literacy and language skills of both children and parents in a variety of ways, including increasing parent involvement in children's education, through parent education classes, and by placing children in a classroom setting that helps prepare them for future success in school.

Program Limitations

- Resources are needed to expand the program and to provide more classrooms for adult literacy.
- Resources are needed to work with the families even more frequently, perhaps four times each week instead of twice.
- Recent changes in immigration laws may have interfered with families' abilities to participate in the ASPIRE program. There is some evidence that fear may prevent some families from participating to the fullest possible extent in the program, throwing another obstacle into the path of recruiting new families into the program.
- Innovative techniques should be employed to encourage fathers as well as mothers to participate in the Even Start/ASPIRE intervention program. Currently, programs and classes are attended almost exclusively by the mothers, with only occasional participation by the fathers. ASPIRE staff should continue to investigate creative methods to more fully involve the fathers as partners in their children's education.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Early Childhood Program Description instrument is divided into 10 content areas:

- interactions among staff and children;
- curriculum;
- staff-parent interactions;
- staff qualifications and development;
- administration;
- staffing patterns;
- physical environment;
- health and safety;
- nutrition and food service; and
- evaluation.

For this evaluation only, the sections on interactions among staff and children, curriculum, physical environment, and health and safety were used. This decision was made in the interest of practicality as other measures of parent participation, staff characteristics, administration and the evaluation process were already a part of the overall program evaluation. Furthermore, the nutrition and food service portion of the instrument was deleted because the ECE classes are less than half a day. Although children do receive a nutritious snack daily, meals are not prepared and served as part of the program.

On the four sections of the ECPD that were used, the following items were omitted, in compliance with the ECPD instructions which state that these criteria should be used *only if applicable*:

Criterion	Content	Reason Omitted
B-3a	modifications to meet child's special needs	not applicable at this time; no special needs children enrolled at this time
B-5e	developmentally appropriate materials for school-agers	no school-agers participating in the program at this time
H-16b	safety of cribs	no cribs in classroom

These three items were omitted from the program's total rating as well as from the total possible rating presented in Table 4.

APPENDIX B: PRACTICAL PARENT EDUCATION MODULES

1.1 Understanding the family system as a whole

1.3 Identifying your role as the primary model for your child

2.1 Developing and maintaining trusting relationships within the family

2.2 Understanding attachment and bonding between parent and child

3.1 Communicating effectively with children at all stages

3.3 Expressing and communicating feelings and emotions

3.6 Dealing with anger in the family

4.1 Building and maintaining self-esteem in children

4.3 Building and maintaining self-esteem in parents

5.2 Choosing effective discipline techniques

5.4 Dealing with sibling rivalry

6.3 Dealing with stress in the family

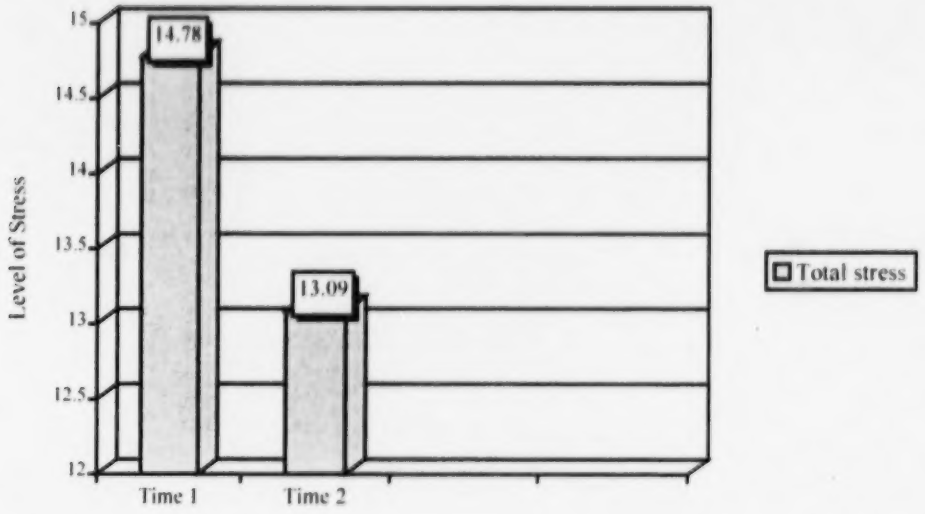
APPENDIX C: PARENTING STRESS INDEX SCALES

Changes in Total Stress and Each Source of Stress Related to Child Characteristics and Parenting, Time 1 to Time 2

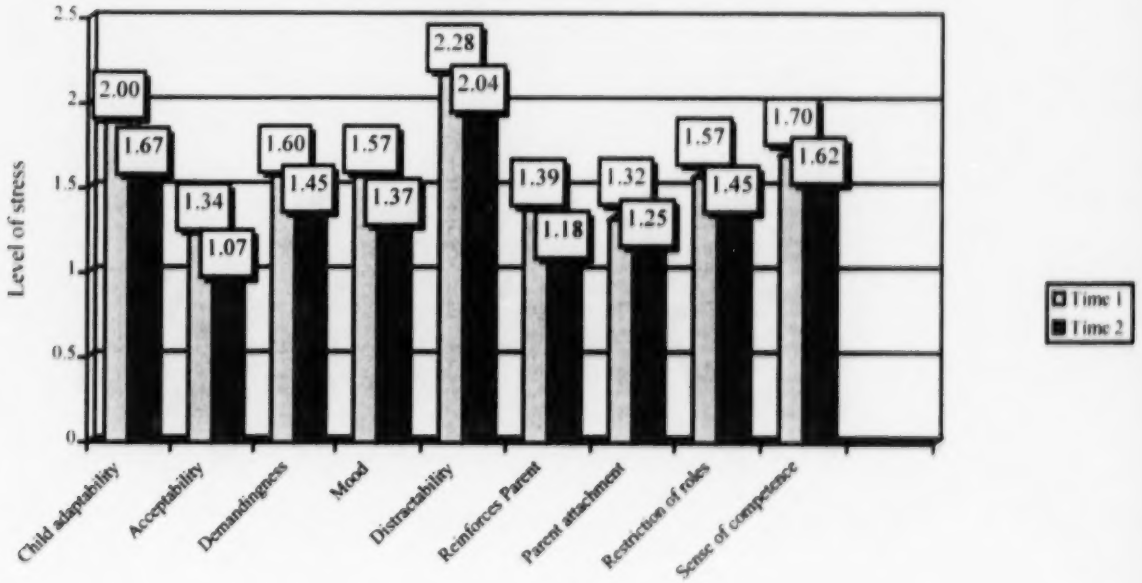
Scales	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	*t* - test
Total Stress					
time 1	14.78	4.34	7.68	27.98	7.81***
time 2	13.09	3.47	7.69	21.52	
Child Acceptability					
time 1	1.34	1.01	.00	3.43	- 1.5
time 2	1.07	.54	.00	2.14	
Child Adaptability					
time 1	2.00	.62	.91	3.50	- 2.3*
time 2	1.67	.58	.73	2.75	
Child Demandingness					
time 1	1.60	.53	.56	2.67	- 1.89
time 2	1.45	.62	.11	2.78	
Child Distractibility					
time 1	2.28	.47	1.22	3.00	2.17*
time 2	2.04	.54	1.00	3.44	
Child Moodiness					
time 1	1.57	.63	.60	2.80	- 1.42
time 2	1.37	.79	.40	3.00	
Child is Reinforcing to Parent					
time 1	1.39	.90	.00	3.40	
time 2	1.18	.68	.00	2.80	1.5
Parent's Attachment to Child					
time 1	1.32	.70	.43	3.43	-.64
time 2	1.25	.58	.29	2.43	
Parents' Sense of Competence					
time 1	1.70	.66	.64	3.25	.84
time 2	1.62	.53	.27	2.50	
Restriction in Parental Role					
time 1	1.57	.50	.86	3.14	.94
time 2	1.45	.66	.29	3.29	

* $p < .05$; *** < .001; < .10

Change in Total Stress Due to Child Characteristics and Parenting, Time 1 to Time 2



Change in Stress Related to Child Characteristics and Parenting,Time 1 to Time 2



Changes in Total Stress and Stress Due to Parent Characteristics Not Directly Related to the Childrearing

Scales	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	*t* - test
Total Stress					
time 1	5.78	2.47	1.87	14.20	.23
time 2	5.11	2.41	1.00	10.87	
Parent Depression					
time 1	1.34	.56	.00	2.56	.77
time 2	1.24	.75	.00	2.78	
Parent's Social Isolation					
time 1	1.47	.89	.33	4.83	1.41
time 2	1.22	.67	.17	3.00	
Parent's Health					
time 1	1.75	.80	1.00	4.80	.09
time 2	1.74	1.0	1.00	4.80	
Relationship with Spouse					
time 1	1.22	.85	.00	3.29	2.41*
time 2	.90	.68	.00	2.57	

* $p < .05$

Changes in Total Stress and Each Source of Stress Related to Child Characteristics and Parenting Over Three Time Periods

Scales	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	*F* - test
Total Stress					
time 1	14.79	5.83	7.68	22.98	4.51*
time 2	10.07	2.87	4.58	14.83	
time 3	9.72	3.79	5.48	19.08	
Child Acceptability					
time 1	1.01	1.20	.00	3.43	4.55*
time 2	.77	.54	.00	1.67	
time 3	.62	.49	.00	1.66	
Child Adaptability					
time 1	2.09	.69	1.00	3.5	1.12
time 2	1.37	.39	1.00	2.0	
time 3	1.44	.60	.73	2.75	
Child Demanding					
time 1	1.73	.65	.78	2.67	4.48*
time 2	1.23	.49	.67	2.11	
time 3	1.09	.58	.22	1.78	
Child Distractibility					
time 1	2.18	.67	1.00	3.44	1.35
time 2	1.81	.22	1.44	2.12	
time 3	1.86	.53	1.22	2.87	
Child Moodiness					
time 1	1.45	.60	.60	2.60	1.91
time 2	1.22	.81	1.00	2.60	
time 3	.93	.73	.00	2.20	
Child is Reinforcing to Parent					
time 1	1.69	1.13	.00	3.40	6.06*
time 2	.31	.40	.00	1.33	
time 3	.43	.54	.00	1.67	
Attachment to Child					
time 1	1.31	.83	.57	3.43	11.74**
time 2	1.11	.46	.29	1.57	
time 3	1.17	.43	.14	1.57	
Parent's Sense of Competence					
time 1	1.68	.63	1.00	3.25	15.29***
time 2	1.38	.53	.09	2.18	
time 3	1.42	.64	1.00	2.56	
Restriction in Parental Role					
time 1	1.65	.64	.86	3.14	.61
time 2	.87	.77	.29	3.29	
time 3	.76	.60	.43	2.86	

$p < .10$, * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Changes in Total Stress and Stress Due to Parent Characteristics Not Directly Related to the Childrearing

Scales	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	*F* - test
Total Stress Due to Parent Factors					
time 1	10.63	2.23	1.87	8.93	1.97
time 2	8.42	2.72	.57	10.94	
time 3	8.62	2.65	.97	11.31	
Parent Depression					
time 1	1.31	.74	.00	2.56	.34
time 2	1.11	.71	.00	2.67	
time 3	1.17	.78	.00	2.67	
Parent's Social Isolation					
time 1	1.08	.42	.50	2.00	.35
time 2	.92	.80	.00	2.50	
time 3	1.01	.75	.00	2.67	
Parent's Health					
time 1	1.88	.56	1.00	2.80	3.73
time 2	1.37	.81	.40	3.20	
time 3	1.7	.75	.40	3.40	
Relationship with Spouse					
time 1	.76	.74	.00	1.86	1.38
time 2	.63	.75	.00	2.57	
time 3	.82	.79	.00	2.57	

$p < .10$

Austin Independent School District

Department of Accountability, Student Services, and Research
Dr. Mel D. Coleman, Executive Director

Office of Program Evaluation
Dr. Holly Williams, Assistant Director

Authors:
Ralph Smith, M.Ed.
Deborah Jacobvitz, Ph.D.
John Wooley, M.Ed.
Danielle Crosby, ABD

Board of Trustees

Kathy Rider, President
Jerry Carlson, Vice President
Liz Hartman, Secretary

Tom Agnor
Rudy Montoya
Loretta Edelen
Melissa Knippa
Geoff Rips
Ted Whatley

Superintendent of Schools
Dr. James H. Fox, Jr.

Publication Number 96.20
November 1997